



LACAN & THE DISCOURSE OF THE HYSTERIC

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The theory of the four discourses

With respect to hysteria, the post-Freudians were only able to offer a confusing mass of data. The only sensible thing to do at the time was to bring some order into this chaos. By taking our distance and considering things from a historical point of view, we were able to conclude that hysteria was fated to disappear for this particular form of psychoanalysis. The reverse, however, is equally true: that this particular form of psychoanalysis is disappearing from the hysteric's field of interest.

Exit all post-, para- and anafreudians. As a post-post-Freudian, Lacan became the first Freudian. An exposition of a key part of his teaching will allow us to take three steps: first of all, to confirm a previous conclusion, namely, that Freud's position at the end of his first period can be understood as that of a master; secondly, to demonstrate the usefulness of the university discourse as a concept with which to group most post-Freudians together, insofar as they constantly refer to the master, (and probably, in the next decennia, all post-Lacanian too); thirdly, to introduce Freud's later theory in which analytic discourse plays a central role.

The reader will probably be wondering why we discard chronology. Why fit the post-Freudians and Lacan between Freud I and Freud II? There are a number of reasons for doing this. We have already mentioned the first one: although most references to hysteria after Freud were limited to his early theories, they were embellished with concepts and remarks from his later period. As a result, the post-Freudians can easily be understood with reference to Freud I, and even to the pre-Freudians. Another reason is our conviction that the best way to understand Freud II is by means of the pathways opened up by Lacan. Indeed, Lacan has made explicit a number of concepts implicit in Freud without which his second theory would remain incomprehensible. The two most important concepts with respect to hysteria are 'jouissance' and 'pleasure,' where the latter is in opposition to the former. The most important reason of all concerns the crucial post-Freudian confusion in relation to hysteria. We have already noted that from 1920 onwards, the question "What is hysteria?" was not so much answered as brushed

aside. Lacan's theory of the four discourses will provide us with a structural solution which is consonant with Freud's later ideas. As these ideas are precisely the ones that have been forgotten, we will become acquainted with a relatively unknown Freud. The whole of our attention will focus on this Freud in our last section.

Towards a new diagnostic: the discourse

During the late sixties and the early seventies, the intellectual talk of the town was of structuralism and the structuralists, and Foucault, Lacan and Barthes were its stars. The fact that each of these three denied being a structuralist was considered irrelevant, and merely added a bit of Parisian spice and frivolity to the discussion.

As far as Lacan is concerned, it is rather difficult to answer the question whether he was or was not a structuralist. Of course, everything depends on the definition one adheres to. Nevertheless, one thing is very clear: Freud was not a structuralist and if Lacan was the only post-Freudian to lift psychoanalytic theory to another and higher level, then this "*Aufhebung*," this raising up in Hegel's sense, has everything to do with Lacanian structuralism and formalism. The rest of the post-Freudians stayed beneath Freud, descending to the level of the pre-Freudians as often as not.

It is obvious that Freud was fundamentally innovative and operated on his own to effect a shift towards a new paradigm in the study of mankind. He was so fundamentally innovative that it seems almost impossible to go any further. This immediately raises a question concerning the gains of Lacanian theory.

In order to appreciate the gain, we have to return to the fundamental difficulty of the psychological study of man. Within a classical scientific approach, one starts with observation and description, and then takes the step towards categorisation and generalisation. This was the approach of pre-Freudian and post-Freudian psychology and psychiatry, and in both cases it proved to be a failure. Taking the step from the observation of an individual to a generalised category proved to be a very frustrating business. Everyone who has been trained in psychodiagnostics, which is the first step in this kind of scientific approach, knows exactly what this frustration is about. By means of observation and interview, the clinician takes a sample of a number of characteristics of an individual patient, which then have to match with the characteristics dictated by a psychiatric handbook. They have to match, but of course they never do. The solution of the classical approach is

always a variant on the same theme, involving a differentiation between primary and secondary characteristics; the primary and the secondary characteristics of schizophrenia for example. The latest solution to the same problem is illustrated by the DSM-III-R, where one is left with an element of choice: a patient is called borderline if he shows at least five symptoms out of a list of eight, etc.

What is interesting about this failure is that its core is the tension between clinical reality and conceptualisation, which always returns in one form or another. Lacan has summarised this tension in one of his paradoxical statements: "Psychanalyse, c'est la science du particulier," that is: "Psychoanalysis is the science of the particular." One of Freud's innovations was his solution to this problem. Instead of constructing his own categorical system in which every patient had to find his proper place, and then trying to convince the world that his system, and only his, was the useful one, he opted for a completely different approach. Every patient was listened to, and every case study resulted in a category into which one and only one patient fitted. In his *Studies on Hysteria* he had already remarked that hysteria did not exist as a separate category, and that clinical reality always revealed mixtures of different kinds of neuroses whose pure form is only found in textbook psychology.¹ The paradoxical result of this Freudian approach, which privileged the individual, even the individual symptoms of one individual patient, was that Freud was the only person who succeeded in making a general theory of the human psyche. His method is anything but secret. In order to make the step from individual clinical reality to a general conceptualisation, Freud made use of a ready-made theory, or almost ready-made. Indeed, the core of Freudian theory is based on classical myths and stories, the tragedy of Oedipus and the story of Narcissus being the most famous examples. If one looks in the last volume of the Standard Edition, one finds ten pages filled with references to works of art and literature. Freud went even further with his solution by inventing a myth when he could not find a suitable one: the primal father in *Totem and Taboo*.

This Freudian approach resulted in a major breakthrough and a new paradigm. Nevertheless, there were a couple of serious disadvantages. This method was only useful so long as the story is kept sufficiently vague. The moment one studies the myth in its particularity, it becomes part of that science of the particular. Oedipus himself had his own version of the Oedipus complex... A second and even more important disadvantage concerns the content of these myths, specifically the

possibility that this content might come to be psychologised and given substantial reality. That is what happened to Jungian and post-Jungian theory. Without going any further into this, one Lacanian quotation suffices to point out the pitfalls. "Authentifier l'Imaginaire, c'est remplir l'anté-chambre de la folie," "If you authenticate the Imaginary, you fill the waiting-room of madness."²

It is in this light that we have to consider Lacanian theory as a major breakthrough.³ Whereas Freud made the step from the individual patient to the underlying myths, Lacan made the step from these myths to the formal structures that govern them. The most important Lacanian structure in this respect is the theory of the four discourses.

The advantages of these formal structures are obvious. First of all, there is an enormous gain in the level of abstraction. Just as in algebra, almost anything can be represented by those 'petites lettres,' the small letters, the *a*, the *S* and the *A*, and the relationships between them. It is precisely this level of abstraction that enables one to fit each individual subject into the main frame. Secondly, because these formal structures are totally stripped of flesh and bones, they diminish the possibility of psychologising. If one makes the comparison between the Freudian primal father and the Lacanian *S*₁, the difference is very clear: with the first one, everybody sees before them an ageing silverback gorilla, running riot among his females. It is very difficult to imagine this ape when writing *S*₁... and it is precisely this that opens up the possibility of other interpretations of this very important function.

This brings us to the third advantage: these structures allow us to steer clinical practice in a very efficient way. Indeed, it makes an enormous difference whether one uses the discourse of the master or that of the hysteric within a given situation; the respective formulas allow one to predict what the effect of a particular choice will be.

There is of course one disadvantage with this system. Compared to the Freudian myths and age-old stories, the Lacanian algebraic structures are seen as boring. There is no flesh on them, they concern the bare bones and are therefore utterly lacking in the attractions of the Imaginary order so prevalent in those stories. That is the price one has to pay.

The diagnostic criteria based on this way of thinking are completely new. The most fundamental differences from classical psycho-diagnostics can be summarised as follows. Firstly, it is a linguistic structure which furnishes the starting-point. Secondly, the other receives a very prominent place in the diagnosis. Thirdly, the core of the system concerns

jouissance, albeit in a very strange way—each discourse is a specific method of avoiding jouissance, of erecting a protection against it and of keeping desire intact. In the end, every discourse delivers an answer to a question that occupied Lacan's mind from the start: who is speaking? What is the position of a subject within speech?

Qua theory, the discourses represent the pinnacle of Lacan's thinking about psychical identity. They also mark a break with the neo-Freudians as well as with Freud himself. Until then, the psyche was thought of as a substantial essence that was buried deep 'somewhere'—the inner self of a personality—and the unconscious was the reservoir of all wishes constituting the basement of this inner self. For Lacan, this basement, indeed the whole house, is empty. Everything takes place on the street. Identity is always outside with the Other or, more precisely, in the particular relation to this Other. That is the meaning of (in)famous statements such as "The Unconscious is the discourse of the Other" or "Man's desire is the desire of the Other." This vision is so new that it has hardly penetrated, even within Lacanian circles. The temptation to think "I am a God in my deepest thoughts" is probably too great. The theory of discourse is a formalisation of this new vision.

Discourse and communication: positions and disjunctions

Discourse naturally evokes the idea of communication, which has been at the centre of attention for the last twenty-five years in many different fields, from human relations through electronics to genetics. There is one unifying aim which characterises these different aspects of so-called communication theories: they want to bring communication to a standard of perfection which eliminates any kind of 'noise,' so that the message can flow freely between sender and receiver. The basic myth governing these theories is the ideal of perfect communication without any hitches whatsoever.

This idea has nothing to do with the original concept of discourse, as it was coined by Michel Foucault in December 1970, during his inaugural speech at the Collège de France. For him, there was a very special relationship between power and discourse. The impact of a given discourse makes itself felt by imposing its signifiers on another discourse. For example, during the Gulf war, bombing was described as being "surgical measures carried out with surgical precision," and these metaphors were expressions of the power of medical discourse, insofar as they were used outside their proper field of application. In this respect, the analysis of a discourse is a very useful instrument of

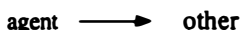
historical research on the evolution of power, which is precisely what Foucault wished to do.

Lacanian discourse theory has nothing to do with either of these two. His theory is even in radical opposition to communication theory as such, because it starts from the assumption that communication is always a failure, and, moreover, *that it has to be a failure*, and that is the reason why we go on talking. If we could understand each other we would all remain silent, and the perfect, dreamt-of *communio* would take place within an appropriate silence and with hands in front of closed eyes. Luckily people don't understand each other, so they have to speak to one another. The discourses draw a number of lines along which this impossibility of communication can take place. This is where the difference with Foucault's theory shows itself. In his theory of discourse, Michel Foucault works with the concrete material of the signifier, which puts the accent on the *content* of a discourse. Lacan, on the contrary, works beyond the content and accentuates the formal relationships that each discourse establishes in the very act of speaking: "...as a necessary structure of something that largely exceeds always more or less casual speech. (...) it consists of fundamental relations that literally would have no existence without language."⁴ This implies that Lacanian discourse theory has to be understood in the first place as a *formal* system, independent of any spoken word as such. A discourse exists before any concrete word is spoken and, to go further, a discourse determines the concrete speech act. This effect of determination is the reflection of a basic Lacanian assumption, namely that each discourse incarnates a fundamental relationship, resulting in a particular *social bond*. As there are four discourses, there will be four different social bonds.

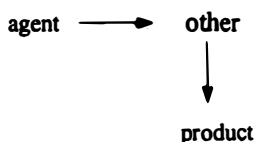
It is important to understand that each discourse is empty to start with. They are nothing but empty vessels with a particular form which will determine the content that one puts into them, and then they can contain almost anything. The moment one reduces a given discourse to one interpretation, the whole theory implodes and one returns to the science of the particular. As a vessel, each discourse has four different compartments into which one can put things. The compartments are called *positions* and the things are the *terms*.

There are four different positions, standing in a fixed relationship to each other. The first position is obvious: each discourse starts with somebody talking, called by Lacan the *agent*. If one talks, one is talking to somebody, and that is the second position, called the *other*. Those two positions are of course nothing else but the conscious expression

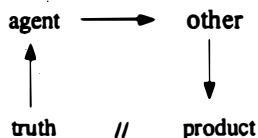
of each speech act, and in that sense they are at the core of every theory of communication:



Within this minimal relationship between speaker and receiver, between agent and other, a certain effect is aimed at. The result of the discourse can be made visible in this effect, and that leads to the next position, called the *product*.



Up to this point, we are still within classical communication theory. It is only the fourth position which introduces the psychoanalytic point of view. In fact, it is not the fourth, but the very first position, namely the position of *truth*. Indeed, Freud demonstrated that, while man is speaking he is driven by a truth, even if it remains unknown to himself. It is this position of the truth which functions as the motor and as the starting-point of each discourse.

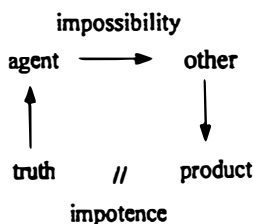


The position of truth is the Aristotelian Prime Mover, affecting the whole structure of a discourse. Its first consequence is that the agent is only apparently the agent. The ego does not speak, it is spoken. Observation of the process of free association leads to this conclusion, but even ordinary speaking yields the same result. Indeed, when I speak I do not know what I am going to say, unless I have learned it by heart or I am reading my speech from a paper. In all other cases, I do not speak so much as I am spoken, and this speech is driven by a desire with or without my conscious agreement. This is a matter of simple observation, but it wounds man's narcissism deeply; which is why Freud called it the third great narcissistic humiliation of mankind.⁵ He expressed it very pithily: "dass das Ich kein Herr sei in seinem eigenen Hause," "The ego is not master in its own house." The Lacanian equivalent of this Freudian formula runs as follows: "Le signifiant, c'est ce qui représente le sujet pour un autre signifiant." In this turning of the

scales—since it is not the subject but the signifier which leads in the definition—Lacan defines the subject as a passive effect of the signifying chain, certainly not the master of it. The agent of discourse is only a fake agent, “un semblant,” a make-believe entity. The real driving force lies underneath, in the position of the truth.

A second consequence of the introduction of this driving force is that the communicative sequence of a discourse is disrupted. One might almost be tempted to expect a logical sequence following which the agent translates the truth into a message, which is then directed to the other and resulting in a product which, in a feedback movement, is returned to the sender. This is not the case. In Lacanian theory, there is no such thing as a truth which can be completely put into words; on the contrary, the exact nature of the truth is such that one can hardly put it into words at all. There are always some elements in the Real which can never be verbalised. Lacan calls this characteristic “le mi-dire de la vérité,” the half-speaking of the truth.⁶ Again, this is essentially a Freudian idea: complete verbalisation of the truth is impossible because primary repression keeps the original object definitively beyond the realm of language, which means at the same time *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. The result of this is an endless compulsion to repeat, a never-ending attempt to verbalise the non-verbal. Another consequence, of course, is the endless insistence of this “mi-dire de la vérité,” which was beautifully expressed by Kierkegaard: “Repetition is a beloved wife of whom one never tires.”⁷ Hence, every discourse is an open-ended structure, in which the open-endedness functions as a causal element: because of the structural lack, the discourses keep on turning.⁸

As well as these four positions, the formal structure of a discourse consists of two *disjunctions*, which express the disruption of the line of communication. These disjunctions are the most important and the most difficult part of the whole theory. On the upper level of the discourse, we have the disjunction of *impossibility*; on the lower level, we are confronted with the disjunction of *impotence*. The two are interrelated.



Disjunction of impossibility: the agent, who is only a make-believe agent, is driven by a desire which constitutes his truth; as this truth cannot be completely verbalised, the agent cannot completely transmit his desire to the other; hence a perfect communication via words is logically impossible. This is the Lacanian explanation for well-known difficulties of communication. However, this disjunction of impossibility goes further. What Lacan is expressing here is nothing less than the famous "Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel," the non-existence of sexual rapport. This statement, already a very dense summary of a whole theory, is here even more condensed in the disjunction of the upper part of the discourse.⁹ The bridge between agent and other is always a bridge too far, with the important result that the agent remains stuck with an impossible desire. This is important because it forms the basis for the particular social bond which characterises each discourse. So each of the four discourses will unite a group of subjects by means of the particular impossibility of a particular desire.

Following this, on the lower level, there is the disjunction of impotence. This impotence concerns the link between the product and truth. As a result of the discourse of the other, the product has nothing to do with the truth of the agent. If it were possible for the agent to verbalise his truth completely for the other, this other would respond with an appropriate product; since this precondition is never fulfilled, no product can match what lies in the position of truth.

To depict these two disjunctions in a simple way, it is best to start from the opposite point of view where these disjunctions are abolished, as in "*Le dimanche de la vie*," the "Sunday of Life," and where the dreamt-of perfect communication and sexual relationship would be possible. In that case, the truth would find complete expression in the desire of the agent for the other, thus realising the perfect relationship between them, whose product would be the definitive satisfaction that embraces the truth. This Hollywood scenario would be conditional upon everything taking place outside the realm of the signifier, otherwise it would be structurally impossible. Once one speaks, the verbalisation of the truth of the matter becomes impossible, resulting in the impossibility of realising one's desire in the place of the other ("my place or your place?"), and thus in the impotence of the convergence between product and truth.

These two disjunctions are the most difficult and the most impenetrable part of the theory of discourse. They condense a major Freudian discovery, namely the constant failure of the pleasure principle and the

consequences of that failure. It is a failure which finds its expression in the disjunction of impotence, with the resulting impossibility. Man can never return to what Freud called "*die primäre Befriedigungserlebnis*," the primary experience of satisfaction; he is *unable (impotent)* to operate this return because of the primary "*Spaltung*," the division of the subject in language.¹⁰ Nevertheless, he keeps on trying, and in the process he gets stuck, that is, he experiences *impossibility*. Every biography can be read as a story about this impossibility. Now, instead of lamenting the human condition, it is much more important to understand the crucial thing about this impossibility, namely that it is only an upper layer of an underlying impotence, and *that the structure in its totality is a protective one*. If we were able to return to this primary experience of *jouissance*, the perfect symbiotic relationship would be realised and this would imply the end of our existence as subjects. That is why the psychotic subject, who does not share in the structure of discourse, has to find a private solution to this ever present danger of disappearing into the great Other.¹¹ A normally divided subject is protected against this danger. To put it bluntly: on the way towards the bliss of an all-embracing *jouissance* in which we would disappear, we get stuck at the point of orgasm which puts an end to it, at which point we can start all over again. Some people are so afraid that they don't even reach that point either, and stop at an earlier roadblock.

Terms and discourse

In this sense, the four discourses are four different ways for the subject to take a position in relation to the failure of the pleasure principle—the upper level, as well as four different ways of avoiding *jouissance*—the lower level. In that way, each of the four demonstrates a certain desire and its failure, resulting in a typical social bond. The typical character of each concrete discourse is determined by the position of the *terms*. Indeed, the four positions and the two disjunctions always remain the same throughout the different discourses; the difference is situated in the terms, more particularly in the rotation of the terms around the fixed positions.

The terms themselves are obvious, in that they find their origin in an earlier Lacanian theory of the Unconscious and the structure of language. There have to be at least two signifiers in order to have a minimal linguistic structure. This gives us two terms: S_1 and S_2 . S_1 , being the first signifier, has a special status, the Freudian 'boundary,' the 'primary symptom,' or the 'primary symbol' of the *Project*. It is the master-

signifier which aims at obliterating the lack, posing as the guarantee for the process of covering up that lack. The best and shortest example is the signifier 'I' which gives us the illusion of having an identity in our own right. S_2 is the name for the rest of the signifiers, the chain or network of signifiers. In that sense, it is also the name of 'le savoir,' the knowledge which is contained in that chain.

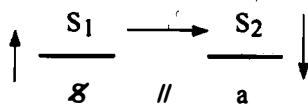
The last two terms are both effects of the signifier. For Lacan, the presence of two signifiers is the necessary condition in order to have a subject: "a signifier is what represents a subject for another signifier." So the third term is the divided subject $\$$. The last but not least of the terms, is the lost object, written as object a . The result of language acquisition is the loss of a primary condition called 'nature.' From the moment man speaks, he becomes a subject of language (a divided subject in fact) who tries to grasp an object which lies beyond language, or, more accurately, a condition beyond the separation between subject and object. This object represents the final term of desire itself; but as it lies beyond the realm of the signifier and thus beyond the pleasure principle, it is irrevocably lost. At the same time, it provides the motor which keeps man going for ever. For Lacan, it constitutes the basis of every form of human causality.

Indeed, the subject tries to recover his lost unity by accumulating signifiers combined into a network. This implies that the cause of the original loss is used as a means to cancel this loss. Obviously, this has to fail and it results in an endless repetition. Nevertheless, the accumulation of signifiers also produces a growing body of knowledge, and without a corresponding increase in *jouissance* for the subject. It is the Other, S_2 , that is enlarged. Lacan equated this knowledge with the *jouissance* of the Other: "le savoir, c'est la jouissance de l'Autre."¹² Even this idea is a Freudian one. One of his first discoveries was that the Unconscious contains a knowledge which is unknown to the subject, and that this knowledge articulates a certain satisfaction beyond the subject: that is the conclusion of *The Interpretation of Dreams, Jokes and their Relationship to the Unconscious* and *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. This linguistic learning device which is always expanding also enjoys itself. (cf. Joy-ce).

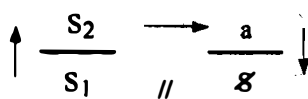
The relationship between knowledge, *jouissance* and subject is in certain respects a paradoxical one. Knowledge restricts the *jouissance* of the subject. Again, it is the signifier which is responsible: the expansion of signifiers, S_2 , leads to a steadily increasing distance from *jouissance* and a confirmation of the loss of object a as 'plus-de-jouir.'

Repetition aims at this *jouissance* but can never reach it as it is always a repetition of signifiers, thereby confirming the original loss of object *a* and of the *jouissance* of the subject.

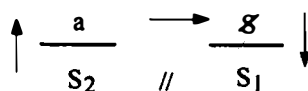
These four terms: S_1 and S_2 , \mathcal{S} and *a*, have a sequential relation which is fixed. While the order remains the same, they can be permuted over the positions, giving four different forms of discourse. On the fifth rotation, one would be back at the starting point, because of the fixed order of the terms.



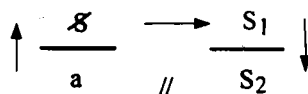
Discourse of the Master



Discourse of the University



Discourse of the Analyst



Discourse of the Hysteric

The hysteric between master and analyst

The discourse of the master

In our first section, we learnt that the hysteric is always in search of an incarnation of the mythical master. As an incarnation, every actual master is doomed to fail. The structure of discourse will show us why. Moreover, the relationship between hysteria and knowledge will become much clearer once it receives its status in the discourse of the hysteric, and is seen in its relation to the discourse of the master.

This master discourse is understood by Lacan as logically prior. It founds the Symbolic Order as such, it gives the Oedipus complex a formal expression and it explains the constitution of the subject. It is the discourse in which both terms and positions seem to match. The agent is the master-signifier, pretending to be one and undivided. As Lacan puts it: it is this particular signifier which gives me the idea that I am (master of) myself: "maître/m'êtré à moi-même."¹³ The desire of this discourse is indeed being one and undivided, that is why the master-signifier tries to join S_2 in the place of the other:

$$S_1 \longrightarrow S_2$$

This desire is impossible: once there is a second signifier, the subject is necessarily divided between the two of them. That is why we find this divided subject in the position of truth: the hidden truth of the master is that even he is divided.

$$\begin{array}{ccc} S_1 & \longrightarrow & S_2 \\ \uparrow & & \\ \mathcal{S} & & \end{array}$$

In Freudian terms: the father is also submitted to the process of castration, the primal father is only an Imaginary construct of the subject. The result of his impossible craving to be one and undivided through signifiers is a mere paradox: it results in an ever increasing production of object a , the lost object.

$$\begin{array}{c} S_2 \\ \downarrow \\ a \end{array}$$

This object a , cause of desire, can never be brought into relation with the division of the subject. The effect is that the discourse of the master precludes the basic fantasy because of its very structure: $\mathcal{S} \diamond a$ is not possible, the master is *impotent* in assuming this relation. That is why he is structurally blind in this respect: $\mathcal{S} // a$.

One of the most interesting things about this discourse is the relationship between master signifier in the place of agent and S_2 in the place of the other. This implies that knowledge is also situated in the position of the other, which means that the other has to sustain the master in his illusion that he is at one with this knowledge. The pupils make

the master or, in Hegel's terms: it is the slave who confirms, through his knowledge, the position of the master. Indeed, this upper part illustrates the fact that the master desires to be the Other, an incarnation of the knowledge desired by some other. It is at this very juncture that the hysterical subject awaits him.¹⁴

It is also the point where the master's blindness is structurally determined. He is blind to his own truth, he cannot recognise this truth, because if he did he would fall from his position and cease to be master. The truth is that the master is also castrated. In Lacanian terms, he is divided by his introduction into language, just like any other speaking creature.

The master disavows his own castration by clinging to the master signifier. This signifier is the plug in the fundamental lack by means of which the master believes himself to be one, *m'être/maître à moi-même*. We have seen that the most characteristic example of this master signifier is the pronoun 'I,' which has a particular status in linguistics. The I of the master is meant to be identical to itself, so that the gap and the difference between the I of enunciation and the I of what is enunciated is denied. For Lacan, this denial is the start of a new contemporary dictatorship: egocracy.

The failure of this is obvious to see in the upper part of the discourse. As an S_1 , a subject identical to the unique master signifier, the master tries to reach S_2 , which is the pathway to lost jouissance. He necessarily fails in this because if he really wants to take up the chain of S_2 s, he has to give up his unique position as an S_1 . Thus, the gap remains and jouissance stays out of reach.

This necessary failure of the position of master is very well illustrated in the relationship between Freud and Dora. Freud assumed the position of master by giving the impression that he knew everything there was to know about desire. He betrayed his position by a beautiful negation: "J'appelle un chat un chat," thereby proverbially illustrating the impossibility of naming the object of desire, even in French. At the very moment that he demonstrated his knowledge, $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$, he was also forced to show his own division and his own desire: Dora had to long for Mr K., who had to take the position of her father. His brilliant and persuasive argument was cut short by her sneering remark: "Why, has anything so very remarkable come out?"¹⁵ Freud's exasperation betrayed his loss of jouissance. His knowledge was lost in the act of speech, entropy was inevitable. This becomes even clearer

in the discourse of the university which is a weaker form of that of the master.

The only way to uphold the position of master is to remain silent. To avoid signifiers saves one from being divided by them. In the end, the only successful master is a dead one, one who has entered eternal silence.

The discourse of the hysteric

When we rotate the terms by a quarter, we obtain the discourse of the hysteric. In the place of agent, we find the divided subject, implying that the desire of this discourse is desire itself, beyond any satisfaction. The social bond of this discourse is what Freud described as hysterical identification with a non-satisfied desire, and he theorised this type of identification in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. The classic example used by Lacan is the dream of the butcher's beautiful wife.

Hysteria as a social bond always emphasises the impossibility of desire. This discourse, which is the logical consequence of the discourse of the Oedipal master, is also the discourse of every ordinary neurotic. The moment one speaks, one loses the primary object and becomes divided between signifiers; the net result of that process is an identity which is always in flux plus a desire which insists and can never be satisfied or destroyed, as Freud discovered at the end of *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

$$\begin{array}{c} \uparrow \\ \hline \frac{\mathcal{S}}{a} \end{array}$$

This desire, originating in a primary loss, has to express itself by way of a demand, directed to the other. In terms of discourse, one has to turn the other into a master-signifier in order to get an answer. In this way the hysterical subject always makes a master out of the other, an S_1 who has to produce an answer: $\mathcal{S} \rightarrow S_1$.

This peculiar relationship between hysteric and master was already evident in the post-Freudian publications on hysteria. Two conclusions were formulated: first of all, the so-called objectivity of scientists failed to cover up their inescapable subjectivity; secondly, the hysteric has a strange solidarity with the man as master. Time and again, she raises him up after having made him tumble. The best illustration is Janet's patient who corrected his suggestions while hallucinating.

During the May 1968 protests when hysterical students interrupted the very seminar in which he was preparing the theory of discourse, Lacan gave them a very cold answer: "Ce à quoi vous aspirez comme révolutionnaires, c'est à un maître. Vous l'aurez," "As revolutionaries, you are looking for a master, and you will find one."¹⁶ It took them twenty years to understand... The questions put to the master are basically the same: "Tell me who I am, tell me what I want." Although this master can be found in different places—it could be a priest, a doctor, a scientist, an analyst, even a husband—there is always one common factor: the master is supposed to know, he is supposed to know and to produce the answer. That is why we find knowledge, S_2 , in the position of product. Typically, this answer always misses the point. S_2 as general knowledge is *impotent* in producing a particular answer to the particular driving force of object a in the place of truth: $a // S_2$. This inevitably results in a never ending battle between the hysterical subject and the particular master on duty. That is why revolutions always end with the introduction of a new master, as often as not more cruel and harsh than the previous one, and that is why every master sooner or later ends up with his head in a place where it is not supposed to be. Structurally, the discourse of the hysteric results in alienation for the hysterical subject and in castration for the master. The answer given by the master will always miss the point, because the true answer concerns object a , the object which is forever lost and cannot be put into words. The standard reaction to this failure is to produce even more signifiers but they only lead one further and further from the lost object in the position of truth. The inevitable result is a confrontation between the master on the one hand and the fundamental lack in the signifying chain on the other: it is impossible for the signifying chain to verbalise any final truth. This impossibility causes the failure of the master, and entails his symbolic castration. Meanwhile, the master, in the position of the other as S_1 , has produced an ever increasing body of S_2 , of knowledge. It is this very knowledge that the hysterical subject experiences as profoundly alienating: as an answer to her particular question she receives a general theory, a religion, a... Whether or not she complies with it, whether or not she identifies herself with it, is besides the point. In every case, the answer will be felt as alienating. Knowledge as a product is *unable* to say anything important about object a in the place of truth: $a // S_2$.

Throughout history we find the following series:

a	S1	S2	8
?	Priest	religion	saint/witch
?	Scientist	science	believer/unbeliever
?	Analyst	psychoanalytic knowledge	good hysteric/ bad hysteric ¹⁷

The bonus in all this is the expanding body of knowledge. If one looks at the history of science, it is easy to arrive at the conclusion that it is essentially a *hystory*: science has always been an attempt to answer the existential questions, and the only result of that attempt is science itself... This is very clear in the human sciences, where even psychoanalysis is a product of hysteria. But the same thing can be said of every development of knowledge, even on a strictly individual level. A developing subject wants to know the answers to his own dividedness, that is why he keeps on reading, speaking and so forth. He will end with a considerable sum of knowledge, but that doesn't teach him very much about his own lost object in the place of truth.

The hysterical subject prompts the other to know. What she desires is knowledge as a means of jouissance. This is structurally impossible, and it transforms her from instigator of knowledge to source of failure, thereby demonstrating the fundamental lack. The hysteric not only sets up the man-master, but also unmasks him: his desire is also determined by object *a*, so even he is divided. At the same time, she also withdraws as his object of desire: it is not she who is desired by him, but object *a*.

This is how the hysteric exposes the paradox of the master as a desiring subject: his truth is that he is also castrated, divided and subject to the Law. The paradox is that in striving to attain jouissance, the only thing he can produce is a knowledge which always falls short and which automatically makes him fail as a master. Indeed, if he wants to display his knowledge he has to speak, but the moment he does, he reveals his division. The only way for a master to stay master is to keep away from the game of desire.¹⁸

At this point, we have to make the transition from master to idealised father. The hysteric's real father is always a 'castrated' one. Both in *The Studies* and in the case of Dora, he appears as weak and ill. Often enough, his procreative potential is long past and he only functions on an honorary level: ex-procreator, as in ex-serviceman. It is here that the idealised father figure appears: as an ideal, he incarnates the possibility of creation in relation to the female, whilst he himself is 'out of service.'¹⁹

This is the necessary condition if he wants to assume the position of the master: as an idealised father, he is an imaginary father, not subjected to primary loss, a complete father beyond castration. In Lacan's formulas of sexuation in *Encore*, this runs as follows: there is only one x not subject to castration: $\exists x \overline{\Phi x}$.²⁰ Freud himself was already aware of the fact that only a dead father could take up such a function beyond castration. In *Totem and Taboo*, it is the murdered primal father who functions as inaugurator of the Law. Only he who does not desire is not submitted to castration, remains undivided and can occupy the position of master. It is interesting to note that anybody occupying the position of master during his lifetime is often credited with complete continence, even if it isn't actually prescribed. Wasn't it said that Freud was without sexual desire after his fortieth year? Another master, Ghandi, took a solemn vow of *brachmacharya* (complete chastity), when he was thirty-six. Whether these are factual truths or not, is of no importance. For our thesis, it suffices that it was attributed to the master. In this respect it might be worthwhile to rethink the analytical rule concerning abstinence, and especially its interpretations.

The idealised father of the hysteric is the dead father; the one who, freed from all desire, is no longer subjected to the fundamental lack and can produce in his own name, S_1 , a knowledge, S_2 , concerning jouissance. Again, this is illustrated by Dora: in her second dream she is notified of the death of her father and that she is required to go to the cemetery for the funeral. What is her response? She goes to an empty flat where she feverishly starts thumbing an encyclopaedia, that is, the book in which she found her knowledge about sexuality. A dead father without desire produces knowledge.²¹

The discourse of the analyst

Within the structural framework of the four discourses, the discourse of the analyst is the exact opposite of that of the master and is the last in the series of permutations or revolutions. This does not necessarily imply that it brings a solution to the latter; the etymological meaning of revolution is after all a return to the point of departure. The product of analytic discourse is the master signifier S_1 , which means that it brings us back to the starting point, the discourse of the master. This is the danger inherent in the discourse of the analyst which is all too often realised. The general structure is as follows.

In the place of the agent we find object a , the cause of desire. It is this lost object which grounds the listening position of the analyst; it obliges

the other to take his own divided being into account. That is why we find the divided subject in the position of the other: $a \rightarrow \mathcal{S}$.

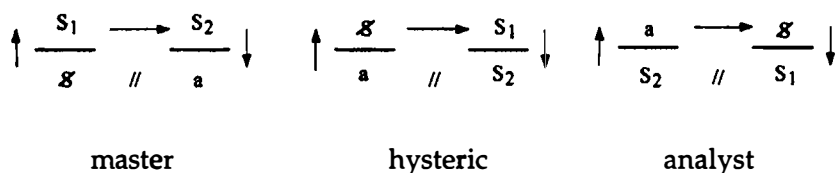
This relationship between agent and other is impossible because it turns the analyst into the cause of desire of the other, eliminating him as a subject and reducing him to the mere residue, the waste of the signifying chain.²² That is one of the reasons why Lacan stated that it is impossible to *be* an analyst. The only thing you can do is to function as such for somebody for a limited period of time. This impossible relationship from a to divided subject is the basis for the development of the transference, through which the subject will be able to circumscribe his object. This is one of the goals of an analysis. It is what Lacan has called "*la traversée du fantasme*," the crossing of the fundamental fantasy. Normally—that is, following the discourse of the master who sets the norm—this relationship is unconscious and partakes of the disjunction of impotence: $\mathcal{S} // a$. The discourse of the analyst, as the inverse of that of the master, brings this relationship to the forefront in an inverted form: $a \rightarrow \mathcal{S}$. From impotence it goes to impossibility, with the difference that it is an impossibility whose effects can be explored: "*Ce qui ne cesse pas de ne pas s'écrire*." The product of this discourse is the master signifier or, in Freudian terms, the Oedipal determinant particular to that subject. It is the function of the analyst to bring the subject to that point, albeit in a paradoxical way: the analytical position functions by means of a non-functioning of the analyst as subject, which reduces him to the position of object. That is why the end result of analytic discourse is radical difference: in the world of make-believe, "*le monde du semblant*," we are all narcissistically alike, but beyond this world we are all fundamentally different. Analytic discourse yields a singular subject, constructing and deconstructing itself throughout the process of analysis; the other party is nothing but a stepping stone. This reminds me of several folk tales and fairy tales in which the beloved, the object of desire, can no longer speak for one reason or another; in this situation the hero has to create a solution in which he is essentially confronted with his own being, a being which was unknown to him before.

The position of knowledge is remarkable in this discourse. One of the major twists in Freud's theory and practice concerned precisely this; the way an analyst makes use of his knowledge. This way, indicated by the discourse of the analyst, is a paradoxical way; knowledge functions in the position of the truth, but—as the place of the agent is taken by object a —this knowledge cannot be brought into the analysis.

The analyst knows, oh yes, he does know, but he cannot do much with it as long as he takes up the position of analyst. That is why this knowledge can be termed a *Docta Ignorantia*, a "learned ignorance," as Nicholas of Cusa called it in the Fifteenth century. The analyst has wisely learned not to know, and in so doing he opens up a way for another to gain access to what determined his or her subjectivity.

The product of the discourse of the analyst is an S_1 , a master signifier. The revelation of this signifier, which determines the vicissitudes of the analysand, is meant to annihilate its effects. It is strange, says Lacan, that the discourse most opposed to that of the master yields a product which is precisely the basis of the master discourse itself.²³ Obviously, this has to take place in a completely different style: "Il doit se trouver à l'opposé de toute volonté au moins avouée de maîtrise," the analyst has to function at the opposite pole from any conscious desire for mastery.²⁴ This is a structural expression of what is peculiar to the analytic position, even though it is all too often precisely on this point that the analyst fails...

In this way, the discourse of the hysteric can be situated between the discourse of the master and the discourse of the analyst.



The barrier between $a // S_2$ in the discourse of the hysteric is lifted in analytic discourse and shifts instead to the incompatibility between the complete master, undivided and without desire, on the one hand, and knowledge as a means to *jouissance* on the other: $S_2 // S_1$. Analytic discourse demonstrates the impossibility of the discourse of the master providing a solution for hysteria. Indeed, the hysterical subject is on the lookout for a master ($\mathcal{S} \rightarrow S_1$) who can produce knowledge of *jouissance*:



The discourse of the analyst takes up this impossibility in the master discourse, $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$, and demonstrates the impotence of the master: $S_2 // S_1$.

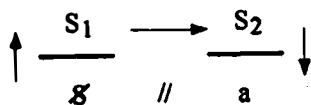
The particularity of the discourse of the analyst resides not only in the avoidance of the classical hysterical solution—the introduction and removal of a master figure—but also in a structural working through of its necessary failure. The effectiveness of the discourse of the analyst is twofold. On the one hand, it forces the patient in the direction of the discourse of the hysteric: the answer to $a \rightarrow \mathcal{S}$ can only result in $\mathcal{S} \rightarrow S_1$, which obliges the patient to subjectivise, to come to terms with the hidden truth of his symptom. Instead of offering his problems to someone else to solve, the patient is confronted with a permutation through which he has to see himself as the centre of the problem. In this way, it is possible for the analysand to come to the truth of his symptom, by exploring his fundamental fantasy. On the other hand, in the discourse of the analyst, the impossibility at the heart of hysterical structure shows up very explicitly as the impossibility of setting up and simultaneously refusing the master. Between $S_2 // S_1$ in the discourse of the analyst there is a barrier on *jouissance*: one has to choose, the two together are impossible.²⁵

This is where one can experience the dialectical value of this formalisation of discourse: based on the reactions of the analysand to an interpretation, the analyst knows quite quickly which position is ascribed to him. If he is situated on the axis $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$, then he will be taken up in the hysterical series: $\mathcal{S} \rightarrow S_1 \rightarrow S_2$. Only the analytical sequence is able to deliver the truth of the symptom: $a \rightarrow \mathcal{S} \rightarrow S_1$. This is on condition that it does not topple over into the “envers,” its other side: the discourse of the master. Insofar as this toppling does happen, it always ends up as a diluted form of the master discourse, namely, the discourse of the university.

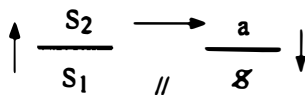
The discourse of the university

For Lacan, the discourse of the university is a regression from that of the master.²⁶ The discourse of the analyst, as its opposite, gives the other pole and the discourse of the university has to be situated between those two:

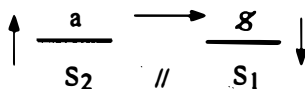
Master discourse:



which, regressing a quarter turn, gives the discourse of the university:



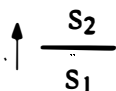
Analytic discourse:



Regression of the discourse of the master also means regression of the master himself: S_1 disappears under the bar, knowledge takes the place of agent and its truth is guaranteed by an S_1 . In the discourse of the university, the master functions as a formal guarantee for knowledge, thereby denying the ever-problematic division of the one who knows. In the end, this denial will be a failure.

It is this knowledge which takes up the position of agent in the discourse of the university. If we turn the terms in the discourse of the master back a quarter, we obtain the discourse of the university as a regression of the discourse of the master, and as the inverse of the discourse of the hysteric. The agent is a ready-made knowledge, whereas the other is reduced to mere object, cause of desire: $S_2 \rightarrow a$.

The history of psychoanalysis illustrates this aim of the discourse of the university: Freud is reduced to a mere guarantee of a closed and well-established knowledge. The problematic aspect of his work is put aside, only his name remains as the master signifier necessary for the guarantee: "Made in..." The unifying aspect of this S_1 already shows itself in the fact that post-Freudianism reduced Freud to a massive whole, a monolith without any internal dynamic. Certainly, the 'evolution' in his work was recognised, but only in the sense of a cumulative progression, which began before Freud ('dynamic' psychiatry), and resulted after him in the pinnacle known as Ego psychology:



This is the social bond which results from a desire to reach this object through knowledge. This knowledge is presented as an organised and transparent unity which can be applied straight from the textbook. The hidden truth is that it can only function if one can guarantee it with a master-signifier.

Every field of knowledge functions by the grace of such a guarantee. In our field: "Lacan has said that...", "Freud has said that..." The primary example of this relationship between knowledge and master signifier is Descartes, who needed God to guarantee the correctness of his science.

In the position of the other, we find the lost object, the cause of desire. The relationship between this object and the signifying chain is structurally impossible: the object is precisely that element, *Das Ding*, which is beyond the signifier. As a result, the product of this discourse is a growing division of the subject: the more knowledge one uses to reach the object, the more one becomes divided between signifiers, and the further one moves away from home, that is, from the true cause of desire: $S_2 \rightarrow a$.

The product of this discourse demonstrates its failure since the result is nothing but the divided subject \mathcal{S} . This is a consequence of the impossible relationship between $S_2 \rightarrow a$. Knowledge does not yield jouissance, only a subject divided by a knowledge expressed in signifiers. This subject, \mathcal{S} , can never be identified with an S_1 because it would require a state of non-division. Between truth and product, the disjunction of impotence insists: $S_1 // \mathcal{S}$.

Moreover, there is no relationship between the subject and the master-signifier in this discourse; the master is supposed to secrete signifiers without there being any relationship with his own subjectivity: $S_1 // \mathcal{S}$. This illusion is behind the 'objectivity' required in classical science.

This formalised exposition of the discourse of the university in relation to the discourses of the master and the analyst, permits us to chart the history of psychoanalysis after Freud. Lacan summed up post-Freudianism in terms of the discourse of the university, as a device for turning the development of the unconscious into a knowledge, a theory. The answer to that is the discourse of the hysteric, demonstrating where this knowledge fails. With Freud, all the emphasis was laid on the discovery, and especially on the way in which this discovery could be made. For Lacan, this can be summed up as the invention of analysis as a new social bond, as a new discourse which has to be understood in opposition to that of the master. This new social relationship is the transference as a means for discovery, for unlocking the unconscious.²⁷ Indeed, this Lacanian thesis finds its best application in the field of hysteria. This was very convincingly demonstrated by André in an exposé whose title is in itself a sum-

mary of this thesis: *La psychanalyse, réponse à l'hystérie?* (Psychoanalysis, an answer to hysteria?).²⁸ Insofar as the hysteric is confronted with a cumulative psychoanalytic knowledge, where the analyst is the latest guru, she will repeat her time-honoured relation to the master. As she has much more experience at this game—in view of the structure of her discourse—this latest master will very quickly join the row of has-beens, of ex-servicemen. In this respect, we can now formulate an answer to the opening question of this chapter, “Where has all the hysteria gone?”, by inverting the question. Hysteria did not disappear; it is rather this form of psychoanalysis which has become a past tense in the greater framework of a hysteria which never ceases to evolve. Moreover, at this point, a certain paradox appears: insofar as we are dealing with a discovery that is invalidated by making a theory of it, the best analysts are actually the hysterics themselves. If the analyst behind the couch produces one interpretation, the hysteric will add ten: she is perfectly at home in the interpretative system, since she started it herself with her defensive imaginisation of the basic lack $S(A)$. Multiplying interpretations, especially in the imaginary, does not make the structure itself yield an inch. The only solution for this ‘master’ behind the couch is either analysis of resistance or the choice of a prudent silence. As most hysterics do not have much trouble in returning the analysis of resistance back to the sender—eighteen-year-old Dora did not have much trouble with Freud—analysts evolved in the direction of what Julien Quäckelbeen has aptly called ‘ecouteurism,’ the silent analyst. This secured a kind of pseudo-analytical position, in the sense that it was a more or less harmless way of incarnating a master figure. The result, however, was that analyses became endless.

In opposition to this evolution, we see Lacan, with his “Return to Freud,” rediscovering psychoanalytic practice. This practice determines a formal social bond within a given structure; its content is always different, albeit within the same structure. This is the discourse of the analyst, supported by an ethical imperative: to open the unconscious, which is always closing, at the point of cause and effect: $a \rightarrow \S$. Interpretation is not limited to an ever shifting desire; full attention must be paid to that around which desire circles in the fundamental fantasy: object a .

It is this shift in focus which Freud broached after 1914.

cover image: Jean-Martin Charcot began working as an instructor at Salpêtrière, the Paris asylum for the insane and incurable in 1862, his primary focus neurology. He believed that hysteria was a neurological disorder caused by hereditary problems in the nervous system. He realised that photography - still in its infancy - was a valuable medium to demonstrate the signs and symptoms of hysterical attacks, and hired professional photographers to take pictures of his patients (almost exclusively women) during the different stages of their attacks. Many of these photographs were published in a multi-volume work, *Iconographie photographique de la Salpêtrière* (1877-1880). These photographs, Charcot believed, provided the 'proof' for his theories about hysterical attacks.

♥ aaaaarg for making available online the full text of this book,
Does the Woman Exist?: From Freud's Hysteric to Lacan's Feminine (1999)

LES PÉTROLEUSES WERE THE SEX WORKERS, WITCHES, AND LADY-PROLES OF
THE PARIS COMMUNE WHOSE 'LOVE OF RIOT' BURNT PARIS TO THE GROUND.

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